

## SECTION II.

### THE EUGENIC PRINCIPLE AND THE TREATMENT OF THE FEEBLE-MINDED

IN the Majority and Minority Reports of the Poor Law Commission the questions relating to the feeble-minded are only briefly reviewed, as they agree in adopting the Report and recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Feeble-minded, which had hardly concluded its sittings before those of the Poor Law Commissioners began. The conclusions of the Poor Law Commissioners with regard to the mentally defective can, therefore, only be given by summarising the Report of the preceding Commission.

In adopting that Report, it is chiefly remarkable as the one instance in which the Poor Law Commission has recognised heredity as a factor in the creation of pauperism, and in which the measures proposed for betterment are not almost exclusively dependent on improvement of conditions. It is a welcome innovation in state effort towards social reform to find that the elimination of degenerate stock has at last been realised as the sole way of preserving a high standard of racial vigour. In suggesting this, it must be remembered that it is not a new and untried experiment which is being brought forward, but a method which has already been practically carried into effect by various Societies for the feeble-minded, and with completely satisfactory results.

The question of the permanent detention of the feeble-minded therefore secures a foremost place in the reforms advocated. If any doubt still lingers in the public mind as to the wisdom of this step, it should be speedily set aside by a consideration of the lot of the feeble-minded in society, and their relation to various social problems. This has been very carefully and exhaustively dealt with by the medical investigators to the

Royal Commission, who have placed before the public, in statistical form, lamentable truths which every Poor Law Guardian and social worker had realised, but which nothing but a comprehensive investigation could establish as incontrovertible fact.

In connection with pauperism generally the tables of the Medical Investigators show that on a day count, 12·7 per cent. mentally defectives were found in the urban, and 18·75 per cent. in the rural workhouses. In the prisons at the lowest estimate the feeble-minded may be reckoned as one in every ten, and the tramps and vagrants average about the same number. The statistics of the Medical Investigators also give 79 per cent. of the children in public elementary schools in England and Wales, as being feeble-minded. As a sad forecast of the probable future of these children, the After-care figures of the 1909 Annual Conference of the National Association for the Feeble-minded may be taken. In giving the statistics of thirteen large towns, they prove that 518 boys and girls only, out of a total of 2,185, are in regular work after leaving the Special Schools. A table presented by the Association, at the time of the Royal Commission, of the earnings of children who had left Special Schools, shows that in eight different centres they averaged only about 8s. weekly. In Birmingham, which was treated apart, Mrs. Hume Pinsent stated that they averaged only 7s. 2d. The very wage-earners, therefore, can only be reckoned as economic nonentities, while the rest, in spite of an extra costly education, represent in after life an actual loss to the community.

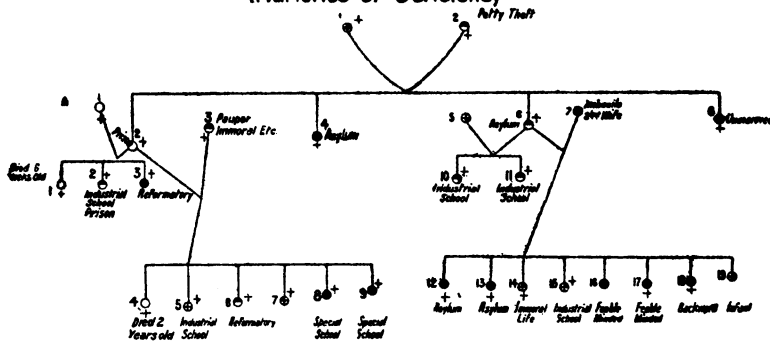
Investigations undertaken by various individuals and Associations demonstrate, perhaps as forcibly, why the segregation of the feeble-minded is demanded in the interests of society. An enquiry made as to the mental condition of the inmates of Inebriates' Homes has disclosed the fact that 62 per cent., or about two-thirds of the whole number, are mental defectives; and for such persons reformatory measures, designed for those destined again to take their place in the world, are completely inappropriate. The same observations may be applied to rescue work; another enquiry has shown that in three years 2,521 such mentally defective women were allowed to go back into the world,

from 100 Rescue Homes, although they had been accountable for an increase of over 1,000 illegitimate children to the population, and were mentally no more fit to take care of themselves than before they entered. Unfortunately the vicious lives of such parents is frequently repeated in that of the children. One of the Medical Investigators, Dr. Tredgold, pointed out in the same connection, that half the women admitted to the maternity wards in Somersetshire during five years, were of feeble intellect.

Yet though the direct results of mental deficiency on the community are calamitous, they are perhaps less dangerous, because more easy to recognise, than the indirect influences, caused by the wholly reckless way in which feeble-mindedness is allowed to permeate society. The history of a family thus tainted will show that even where few of its members are held to be actual mental defectives, its influence as a whole upon the community is completely disastrous. A careful scrutiny of the Family History of Table I. will probably prove convincing in this respect. Dr. Potts also illustrates the subtle spread of this taint of degeneracy; at Birmingham, he states, "many of the defective children are related, either as brothers and sisters, or as cousins. The majority come from bad homes in the worst slums. When investigating the prison it was found that a large percentage of the prisoners had been educated at the Floodgate Street School. This area was, till recently, notorious for the number of low-class public-houses, many of which were the rendezvous of criminals. More than one headmistress stated that when she encountered a defective child she generally found that the home was a dirty and neglected one, the cause usually being that the father did not go to work. Several teachers told me that in the worst slums they estimated that something like fifty per cent. of the fathers did no work." In fact bad influences radiate from such families in a neighbourhood, as the circles spread from a disturbed surface throughout a pool.

Nor is this the worst aspect of the case. Dr. Tredgold and Dr. Ettie Sayer produced evidence which tended to prove that the feeble-minded increased much faster than the normal family, an opinion with which many since that time have expressed

## I. Varieties of Deficiency



## HISTORY ILLUSTRATING DANGER TO SOCIETY OF GIVING MENTAL DEFECTIVES UNRESTRAINED LIBERTY.

Paternal G. father—said to be normal.

" G. mother—given to petty theft.

## 4 Children :

1 daughter; for many years.

1 " Unmarried.

1 son (A) ; very excitable, has been inmate of Asylums (family history given below), now in Workhouse Infirmary.

1 son (B) ; sent to prison on several occasions for drunkenness and cruelty to children (family history given below).

## A's family :—1st wife.

## 3 Children :

1 daughter; died 6 weeks old.

1 son ; committed to Industrial School at 12 (2nd offence), at 24 years had appeared in Police Court 19 times for stealing, begging, housebreaking, etc.

1 son ; Special Class ; at 12 years had been 4 times convicted for stealing, and was sent to Reformatory.

2nd wife.—Poor Law relief stopped when husband in Workhouse Infirmary as woman suspected of immoral conduct. Family repeatedly worried and prosecuted by N.S.P.C.C.

## 6 Children :

1 daughter ; died 2 years.

1 son ; sent to Industrial School, " not under proper control."

1 son ; 8 times convicted, Reformatory.

1 son ; lives away from home.

1 son ; Special School

1 son ; Special School } condition filthy and grossly neglected.

## B's family : 1st wife.

## 2 Children :

1 son ; Industrial School, stealing ; since convicted, " drunk and disorderly."

1 son ; Industrial School, not under proper control ; since, 11 times before Magistrates.

2nd wife.—Imbecile ; in prison three times for cruelty to children, fined for obscene language.

## 8 Children :

1 daughter ; went to class for feeble-minded ; now in Asylum.

1 daughter ; Asylum.

1 daughter ; immoral life.

1 son ; Industrial School.

1 " ; Feeble-minded.

1 girl ; Home for Feeble-minded

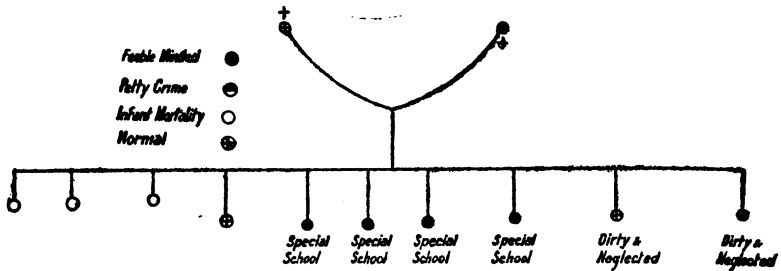
1 girl ; backward

1 infant.

Relieving Officer reports : " family have been a great trouble."

N.B.—(From Notes furnished by Allen Warner, M.D. at the Annual After-care Conference of the National Association, 1909.)

## II. Feeble Minded Family



## CASE ILLUSTRATING AMOUNT OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CHARITY DEVOTED TO MAINTENANCE OF A FEEBLE-MINDED FAMILY.

Father—normal.

Mother—feeble-minded ; absolutely no control over children.

## 10 Children :

3 dead.

1 normal.

1 feeble-minded, at Special School.

1 feeble-minded

1 feeble-minded " "

1 feeble-minded " "

1 } dirty, verminous and neglected.

## (1) Family conditions necessitate frequent visits from :—

*Sanitary Inspector.*

*Health Visitor.*

*School Attendance Officer.*

*N.S.P.C.C. Officer.*

*School Nurse.*

(2) Children in continual attendance at *Infirmary* for various ailments.(3) *Poor Law Relief* obtained at intervals.

concurrence. These huge families of the incompetent, incorrigible, and irresponsible, absorb a large amount of public and private money, and also the time and attention of whole armies of officials and volunteer workers in ministering to their various needs. The extent of this may be realised by glancing at Family History, Table II.

Permanent detention appears, therefore, the only practicable way of preventing a disproportionate increase of the abnormal. As to the degree and methods of extending permanent control, opinions appear to vary. In this connection the pioneer Training Homes for the feeble-minded bought the experience by which their successors have profited, and have proved that even the most favourable conditions will not render the feeble-minded fit to stand on their own feet unassisted. Ten of the Homes furnished information of their earlier work, showing that while a total of 422 girls had left, only one-fourth had gone into service, and of these only two-thirds remained at work; the rest were in Homes, asylums or returned to their friends, and a number had illegitimate children. The majority of the Homes opened since this time are for permanent care only, and it is amply evidenced that the feeble-minded quickly settle down to institutional life, with results which are, in many instances, good beyond expectation.

*Recommendations.* The main burden of the recommendations of the Royal Commission is therefore the necessity, in one shape or other, of continuous control of the mentally defective. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to secure unity of action amongst the various agencies dealing with them. It is therefore proposed to establish a central Board of Control, composed of salaried Commissioners, including a certain number both of barristers and medical men amongst its members. The work of this body is to be locally administered by the County Councils, which are to form a Statutory Committee for the care of the mentally defective. In addition to taking over the duties of the visiting Committees of Asylums, these Committees are to provide for all the epileptics and the mentally defective of every type, within their area.

“The cost of maintenance, care and treatment, education,

training and control shall be borne by the county and county borough Councils aided by new grants from the Exchequer."

For the mentally defective three methods of exercising control are recommended, oversight, certification and detention. Notification to the Local Committees of mentally defective cases is enjoined upon medical officers of institutions and public bodies, and upon anyone receiving such cases for private profit; while the Board of Control is to undertake the supervision and registration of all houses in which mentally defective persons are maintained.

Here, however, it is probable that a great number of persons will slip through the net and escape notification altogether. With reference to future legislation on the subject, it will probably be to the best interest of society to make the notification of cases of mental defect as thorough-going as possible. As notification need not involve removal from the guardianship of friends and relations, hardship could not be pleaded.

Another note must be also added. In recommending an alteration of nomenclature, the Royal Commission chose the term "mental defective," as covering all objects of their investigations,—lunatics, idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded, moral defectives, as well as the mentally defective, epileptic and inebriate. It is remarkable that in a Royal Commission on the "Feeble-minded" (and not "Mentally Defective"), the separate statistics of the feeble-minded class, as such, are entirely absent from the summarised tables, nor are they to be found anywhere but in the tables of the Medical Investigators, grouped under the term "*Other Feeble-minded*" (the italics are our own). This perhaps accounts for the fact that the frequently quoted figures of the 66,000, "needing provision," are often taken as referring to the feeble-minded only, and the fact is ignored that they include all idiots, imbeciles, epileptics and the uncertified insane, both adults and children, in England and Wales, in addition to the feeble-minded.

An extract from their actual enumeration by the medical experts is given, and the percentage upon the total population investigated has been worked out.

	<i>Population (1901)</i>	<i>Total F.M.</i>	<i>Per cent. on Population</i>
STOKE-ON-TRENT	154,889	328	'21
BIRMINGHAM	245,216	421	'17
MANCHESTER	712,420	818	'11
HULL AND SCULCOATES	254,884	141	'05
DURHAM	132,738	73	'05
SOMERSET	153,725	328	'21
WILTS.	151,871	340	'22
NOTTS.	145,339	232	'16
LINCOLN	150,351	224	'15
CARMARTHEN	125,570	64	'05
CARNARVON	137,219	301	'22
<b>Average for all areas</b>			<b>.14</b>

Although legislative measures must deal with the whole of the mentally defective, these figures offer a gleam of hope to those interested in this special type, as it shows their numbers to be less overwhelming than is generally understood.

The preamble of the recommendations concludes with these words: "The aim of the scheme is the application of particular methods suitable for the cases of different persons, not the general adoption of any one method exclusively."

If this indicates that it is intended to leave scope for experiment, adaptation, and a choice of varied means to an end, before certain stereotyped methods are fixed upon, these measures are likely to offer less cause for regret than many which have not enjoyed this advantage. It would be an excellent precedent, and might be a model for more legislation on such lines.

The whole of the problem at present at issue is more than usually complicated, and it may account for the fact that so many different agencies are found at work in connection with it. This has brought about a situation which seems to promise difficulties on the administrative side. The Board of Control, however, could, if it chose, turn the position to its own advantage. It might in this way obtain the greater choice of agencies, and therewith better realise the ideal of the Commissioners, in securing a variety of treatment for the needs of different cases. By utilising all the means now ready to hand, it would thus the more easily and quickly dispose of what is, without doubt, one of the most urgent, yet difficult, social problems now confronting us.